

Keynote Address - Lake House Souvenir Launching May 2006

## **Harmonious Totality as against Divisive Dominance in the Land below or the Heavens above**

-A note from the Buddhist angle

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As an unquestioned pioneer among world religions of today, Buddhism has a historically accepted vast literature dating back to more than two and a half millennia. The *modus operandi* of its traditional handing down is incredibly bewildering. The believed to be most ancient version of it is preserved to us in the Pali language and is referred to as the *Tri-piṭaka*. It should be known by every serious student of Buddhism that an equally extensive derivative literature, also in the Pali language, which necessarily spreads through time is appended to this. Both relate to Buddhism, but the historical stratification of the two layers through time is not to be missed. One should not be surprised, we warn you, if one does find in the latter, the time-wise later tradition, statements relating to Buddhist religious thinking which, at times, are incompatibly unacceptable. We do discover them all the time.

Now let us take a look at what we consider to be the Buddha's original teaching. It is to the credit of the Buddha that he had a two-dimensional vision of the human in the world. While he saw the human directly in front of him, with a local parental origin which is specifically referred to as *mātā-puttaka-sambhavo* or in Sinhala *mav-piyangen bihivana*, he also saw man's trans-*saṃsāric* extension through time and space. With further confirmation from his immediate Indian background, he saw on the one hand, the life of the human linked up with the past. On the other, he saw it extending in the direction of the future to an unimaginable infinity. This track of life through time and space is referred to in

Buddhism as *Saṃsāra*. In the Upaniṣads, the Indians refer to it as `man's moving on from death to death, on account of his ignorance of the unity of *Brahman* and *ātman*. Here I quote to you from the Upaniṣadic text: *mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyuṃ āṇoti ya iha nān'eva paśyati*.

In this, the Buddha saw, on the one hand, the big role which the life of man in this existence plays towards his liberation from the disastrous mess in which life in the world has trapped him. And on the other, the possible further damnation into which he, in his recklessness in life, can calamitously fall. These two aspects of life, Buddhism persistently maintains, are entirely in the hands of the human, never to be passed over to any other believed-to-be greater power, human or divine.

Our delightful handy manual, the Dhammapada presents it precisely as follows. I quote:

*Attanā'va kataṃ pāpaṃ attanā saṅkilissati  
 attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ attanā'va visujjhati  
 suddhī asuddī paccattaṃ  
 nā'ñño maññaṃ visodhaye.*

Dhp. v.165

It is this most realistic vision of human life which he came to possess as the Buddha which made the teachings he gave to the world one of the most productive and benevolent ever delivered on earth. It shall benefit mankind here and now- *sandīṭṭhiko*, and hold good to eternity- *akāliko*.

It is this vision of the world as a totality, evolved into its present pattern of existence, and not created by any one, in any single area for a selected group of favored people who shall fight to death the other all the time, which encompasses all life on earth as deserving our utmost care and concern as humans: *sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā* in the Metta

Sutta [at Suttanipata v.145] = May all beings on earth enjoy happiness and comfort and be able to claim security of life.]. The entire theme of the Metta Sutta in the Suttanipāta [loc. cit.] centers on this, looking upon life, with infinite love and care, wherever it be located, heedless of size and shape, distance and nearness to where one lives. This injunction of the Buddha is perhaps the earliest the world has known for peace on earth and goodwill among men.

But what have we Buddhists made out of this ennobling admonition? Admittedly slipped off the rails. We have made it a protective chant for protection of ourselves against manipulated evil directed towards us by non-humans, both divine and demonic. Perhaps you know this interpretation better than I do. Think of if it once again, yourself. In some of these Buddhist ritualistic practices as they are indulged in today, I tell you, you are helplessly lying on your back like a boxer or wrestler who has been knocked down on the floor. It is time for you today, not a day too early, to get up and regain your feet. Do not linger till you are declared the loser of the day.

Nor is the Metta Sutta's developing loving kindness by humans towards all life in the world a process of invoking happiness on others, through the power of any other, like the enumerated virtues of the Buddha such as *arahaṃ, sammā sambuddho, vijjācaraṇa-saṃpanno* etc. To us Buddhists, it is well and truly our attitudinal changes within us with regard to our relationships with the entire cosmic set up that shall bring happiness and well-being to the world. Neither monks nor laymen shall be conveyor belts carrying benefits like good health, affluence and joys of life to world-lings from a primary source like Buddha. It is the well-adjusted attitudes of humans towards humans as instructed by the Buddha that shall bring happiness to the world of humans and eliminate friction therein. This is undoubtedly the philanthropic aspect of *bhāvanā*.

*Bhāvanā* is self-culture or self-development, with whatever word one renders it in English or Sinhala. Its benefits appear to flow out in two directions. It benefits oneself and it benefits others. The Buddhist process of *bhavanā*, we view as

being mutually inter-active. It benefits the one who undertakes it, because it is no more and no less than grooming oneself for the take off from the down to earth mundane here to the transcendental beyond this, in the supreme unquestionable bliss of Nirvana. Forget not that line which reads *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*.

The world has to be wise enough today to know what peace on earth means. The world has also to be decently honest enough to work in such a way collectively for the attainment of this goal. World peace is never to be achieved via an *emperium in imperio*, i.e. an empire within an empire, with auto-sealed secret compartments within itself. There cannot be super powers in the heavens above who severally claim to confer peace on earth, each according his own choice. People on earth down below, it must be globally remembered, has to form a total unity. To think otherwise, is to invoke wars to destroy those on the other side. This alone makes sense in the world today. We pray, let us not be fooled with this any more, to seek peace severally via each one's God. Globally we witness today a great deal too much of mutual back-scratching. We apologize for using, with the permission of the Oxford Dictionary, such a not-too-elegant word, particularly in the world of international politics.

The Honorable Mr. Prime Minister, we are gathered here today, particularly in view of the celebration of the 2550<sup>th</sup> year of the Buddha Jayanti. More than 2300 years ago when King Devānaṃ Piya Tissa received the gift of Buddhism from the hands of Thera Mahinda, sent here by his friend Emperor Asoka of India, the king of our land pledged to live and work under the jurisdiction of the Buddhist teachings. He initially comprehended the wealth of wisdom Buddhism contained for the successful rule of the land and guidance of the life of man. Therefore he pleaded with the thera to include his residence within the ecclesiastical boundaries of the Buddhist Saṅgha: *Sambuddhāṇāya anto'haṃ vasissāmi jutindhara*.

It was rightly felt that that sober religious thinking which is neither domineering nor expansionist in character, had to be the core of human life on

earth. This is what brings out new books of the world like RELIGION, THE MISSING DIMENSION OF STATECRAFT, published by the Oxford University Press in 1994. In the human world off sanity and sobriety, humans seem to be now regaining this wisdom of peaceful co-existence. Let not the power or strength of any particular group, religious or secular, coupled from time to time under different guises of friendship and goodwill, threaten the peace of mankind, as it does happen round the clock, everywhere. When humanity, either elite or less elite, has to answer for the evil it generates, we shall call it the inescapable Dooms Day.

The Buddhist concept of good governance, globally or provincially, does not require the toppling of any existing pattern of rulership. Wellness of mankind, both in the world we live here, and from here to a state far superior, has to be the basis of any system of thinking which calls itself a religion. Let not the word religion, in any part of the world, drive one crazily into the battle field to eliminate the infidel or the disbeliever. The sooner we get such murderous thinking and their generators out, the world would be a happier place.